

Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper

Frequently Asked Questions

September 2006



Why is the Gulf of Mexico red snapper fishery such a hot topic?

- Red snapper supports one of the most important commercial and recreational fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico (GOM).
- There are three fisheries involved in red snapper harvest and management: directed commercial red snapper, directed recreational red snapper, and commercial shrimp.
- The red snapper stock has been overfished and undergoing overfishing since the late 1980s.
- The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) revised the red snapper rebuilding plan in 2005 to restore the GOM red snapper stock to sustainable levels by 2032. This plan is currently under litigation. The plaintiffs are Coastal Conservation Association, Gulf Restoration Network, and The Ocean Conservancy.
- A recent red snapper stock assessment indicates the rate at which red snapper are being harvested and discarded as bycatch is jeopardizing the success of the rebuilding plan.
- The most recent stock assessment for red snapper can be downloaded at www.sefsc.noaa.gov/sedar/.

What are the known factors contributing to overfishing in GOM red snapper?

- There are three primary sources contributing to overfishing:
 1. shrimp trawl bycatch
 2. directed commercial and recreational harvest
 3. regulatory discards by the directed commercial and recreational fisheries
- The brown shrimp fishery, which contributes the majority of annual shrimp landings, and the directed red snapper commercial fishery are the primary sources of red snapper mortality in the western GOM. The recreational red snapper fishery is the primary source of red snapper mortality in the eastern Gulf of Mexico.
- New data and information since the 1999 stock assessment indicates discard mortality rates in the directed fishery are higher than previously thought. Most directed fishery discards are due to minimum size limits. Release mortality rates are estimated to range from 71% to 82% in the commercial red snapper fishery and 15% to 40% in the recreational red snapper fishery. While the discard mortality rate of the commercial fishery is much higher than that of the recreational fishery, the total number of red snapper annually released by the recreational fishery is substantially higher than that of the commercial fishery.

What is a rebuilding plan?

- A rebuilding plan is a strategy used to manage catches over a specified time period so that an “overfished” stock can increase in size to a legally mandated target level. A larger healthier stock will allow more catch in the future.

What is included in the current rebuilding plan?

- The current rebuilding plan, proposed in Amendment 22 to the Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan (FMP), provides for a total allowable catch (TAC) of 9.12 million pounds (MP), based on the findings of a 1999 stock assessment and assumed achievements in shrimp trawl bycatch.
- The rebuilding plan aims to phase out overfishing by 2009 and rebuild the red snapper stock by 2032.
- The rebuilding plan specifies the need for periodic reviews and adjustments as new stock assessments and assessment updates become available.

Why is it necessary to take action to end overfishing?

- The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) requires NOAA Fisheries Service and the fishery management councils prevent overfishing, and achieve, on a continuing basis, the optimum yield (the harvest level for a species that achieves the greatest overall benefits, including economic, social, and biological) from federally managed fish stocks.
- The purpose of these mandates is to ensure fishery resources are managed for the greatest overall benefit to the nation, particularly with respect to providing food production and recreational opportunities, and protecting marine ecosystems.
- To further this goal, MSA also requires fishery managers to minimize bycatch and bycatch mortality to the extent practicable.

What are the most current regulations under the rebuilding plan?

- The recreational and commercial fisheries operate under a total allowable catch (TAC) of 9.12 million pounds (MP).
- Recreational/Charter Directed Red Snapper
 - 49% of quota
 - Minimum Size Limit: 16” Total Length
 - Closed Season: opens 12:01a.m. April 21 – closes 12:01a.m. November 1 (194-day open season)
 - Daily Bag Limit: 4 per person
- Commercial Directed Red Snapper
 - 51% of quota
 - Minimum Size Limit; 15” Total Length
 - IFQ program under Secretarial review
 - The red snapper IFQ program proposed in Reef Fish Amendment 26, and approved by the Council in March 2006, is intended to eliminate overcapitalization and derby conditions in the commercial red snapper fishery to improve fishery profitability, management, and enforcement. The results of

two referendums mandated by the MSA demonstrated overwhelming support by commercial red snapper fishers for the proposed IFQ program.

- If approved, the IFQ program is scheduled for implementation January 1, 2007. The Council and NOAA Fisheries Service are holding IFQ implementation workshops throughout the Gulf region throughout the fall 2006.

- Commercial Shrimp

- Required to use Bycatch Reduction Devices (BRDs)
- Prohibited from fishing off Texas from May 15-July 15
- A 10-year commercial shrimp vessel permit moratorium effective October 26, 2006 (Amendment 13 to the Gulf of Mexico Shrimp FMP).

What's the status of current action to address overfishing?

- At the August 2006 meeting, the Council decided to delay consideration of regulatory action to address overfishing until January 2007.
- Currently, NOAA Fisheries Service is reviewing its legal obligations to end overfishing to determine if Secretarial action is needed.